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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 002467

SIPDIS

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TAGS: **PREL PINR IR IZ UK IT ITALIAN POLITICS**

SUBJECT: ITALIAN ROLE IN RELEASE OF BRITISH MILITARY PERSONNEL FROM IRAN; LOOKING FOR PAYBACK IN LONDON

CLASSIFIED BY: A/POLMIN PAULA THIEDE. REASON:1.5 (B)(D).

¶1. (C) UK EMBASSY POLCOUNS FRANCIS CAMPBELL TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 24 THAT ITALY PLAYED A "VERY HELPFUL AND CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE" IN SECURING THE RELEASE OF THE EIGHT UK MILITARY PERSONNEL HELD BY IRAN. TELEPHONE CALLS BETWEEN PM BLAIR'S FOREIGN POLICY ADVISOR NIGEL SCHIENWALD AND PM BERLUSCONI'S NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR GIANNI CASTELLANETA PUT THE ITALIANS IN MOTION.

¶2. (C) ACCORDING TO CAMPBELL, HMG DECIDED THAT IT WAS WORTH CASHING IN ON THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT'S RELATIVELY STRONG AND AMICABLE RELATIONS WITH TEHERAN. IN ADDITION TO CURRENT AMBASSADOR TO IRAN ROBERTO TOSCANO, ITALY USED FORMER AMBASSADOR IN TEHRAN AND CURRENT MIDDLE EAST BUREAU DIRECTOR GENERAL SESSA, AS WELL AS IRAN DESK OFFICER AND FORMER POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF IN TEHRAN FEDERICA FERRARI-BRAVO, TO CONVINCE THEIR STILL STRONG CONTACTS WITHIN THE IRAN GOVERNMENT THAT RELEASING THE SERVICEMEN SOON AND UNHARMED WAS IN IRAN'S BEST LONG-TERM INTERESTS. CAMPBELL SAID THAT SESSA ALSO CALLED IN THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR IN ROME. CAMPBELL WAS NOT SPECIFIC ON WHAT AGENCIES OR INDIVIDUALS THE ITALIANS CONTACTED IN TEHERAN.

¶3. (C) NOW THE PAYBACK. ON JULY 13, PM BERLUSCONI PLUS FIVE OF HIS TOP MINISTERS (FOREIGN, INTERIOR, EDUCATION, FINANCE, DEFENSE) TRAVEL TO LONDON FOR A BILATERAL SUMMIT. THE DAY WILL CONSIST OF A MORNING PLENARY, LUNCH, AND THEN BREAKOUTS WITH MINISTERS MEETING THEIR COUNTERPARTS AND BLAIR AND BERLUSCONI MEETING IN A SMALL, POSSIBLY ONE-ON-ONE, GROUP. CAMPBELL HAS HEARD FROM HIS ITALIAN INTERLOCUTORS THAT BERLUSCONI WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS ITALY'S PLACE IN THE EU PECKING ORDER NOW THAT THE EU CONSTITUTION HAS BEEN AGREED, AND FORMAL MECHANISMS ALLOWING SMALLER GROUPINGS OF MEMBER STATES TO PUSH INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN INSTITUTIONALIZED. CAMPBELL AVERRED THAT BERLUSCONI WILL BE LOOKING FOR BLAIR'S SUPPORT IN LAUNCHING ITALY INTO A "EU-4" CLUB OF EU LEADERS.

¶4. (U) MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

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